# ON OUT

Lew Welch

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*By Lew Welch*

*oyez · berkeley . 1965*

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Printed by Graham Mackintosh in an edition of 500 copies

Photograph by Jim Hatch

Some of these poems have appeared in *Contact, San Francisco Review, Synapse, Foote, Nomad, Now Now, The Beat Scene, Fux,* and *The New American Poetry*

*Wobbly Rock* was published as a book by Auerhahn Press. Parts of the poem were anthologized in Italy: *Poesia degli ultimi americani.*

THIS BOOK IS FOR MAGDA

•

*What strange pleasure do they get who'd*
*wipe whole worlds out,*
*ANYTHING,*
*to end our lives, our*
*wild idleness?*

*But we have charms against their rage —*
*must go on saying, "Look,*
*"if nobody tried to live this way,*
*"all the work of the world would be in vain."*

*And now and then a son, a daughter, hears it.*
*Now and then a son, a daughter*
*gets away*

•

## CHICAGO POEM

I lived here nearly 5 years before I could
meet the middle western day with anything approaching
Dignity. It's a place that lets you
understand why the Bible is the way it is:
Proud people cannot live here.

The land's too flat. Ugly sullen and big it
pounds men down past humbleness. They
Stoop at 35 possibly cringing from the heavy and
terrible sky. In country like this there
Can be no God but Jahweh.

In the mills and refineries of its south side Chicago
passes its natural gas in flames
Bouncing like bunsens from stacks a hundred feet high.
The stench stabs at your eyeballs.
The whole sky green and yellow backdrop for the skeleton
steel of a bombed-out town.

Remember the movies in grammar school? The goggled men
doing strong things in
Showers of steel-spark? The dark screen cracking light
and the furnace door opening with a
Blast of orange like a sunset? Or an orange?

It was photographed by a fairy, thrilled as a girl, or
a Nazi who wished there were people
Behind that door (hence the remote beauty), but Sievers,
whose old man spent most of his life in there,
Remembers a "nigger in a red T-shirt pissing into the
black sand."

It was 5 years until I could afford to recognize the ferocity.
Friends helped me. Then I put some
Love into my house. Finally I found some quiet lakes
and a farm where they let me shoot pheasant.

Standing in the boat one night I watched the lake go absolutely
flat. Smaller than raindrops, and only
Here and there, the feeding rings of fish were visible 100 yards
away — and the Blue Gill caught that afternoon
Lifted from its northern lake like a tropical! Jewel at its ear.
Belly gold so bright you'd swear he had a
Light in there. His color faded with his life. A small
green fish . . .

All things considered, it's a gentle and an undemanding
planet, even here. Far gentler
Here than any of a dozen other places. The trouble is
always and only with what we build on top of it.

There's nobody else to blame. You can't fix it and you
can't make it go away. It does no good appealing
To some ill-invented Thunderer
brooding above some unimaginable crag . . .

It's ours. Right down to the last small hinge it
all depends for its existence
Only and utterly upon our sufferance.

Driving back I saw Chicago rising in its gases and I
knew again that never will the
Man be made to stand against this pitiless, unparalleled
monstrocity. It
Snuffles on the beach of its Great Lake like a
blind, red, rhinocerous.
It's already running us down.

You can't fix it. You can't make it go away.
I don't know what you're going to do about it,
But I know what I'm going to do about it. I'm just
going to walk away from it. Maybe
A small part of it will die if I'm not around

feeding it anymore.

## A ROUND OF ENGLISH

*for Philip Whalen*

1.

The day I first woke up everybody had scabs on their eyes
and I couldn't get to a mirror fast enough.

Everybody said that nothing had changed 'cause nothing ever could.

I thought I knew how to talk, but somebody showed up who
could have heard it all, and I didn't have a thing to say.

Somebody else said, "Proust."

2.

It was all about a lady who gave vulgar soirees.
It was all about whales, and a harpoon sharp enough to shave with.
And "Look,
"if you're really interested,
"which I seriously begin to doubt,
"you'll get it from the guys he stole it from."

*She baréd her bosom*
*I whupped out m'knife*
*Carved my initials on her thin breast bone*

•

"Thin brass dome, beautiful!
"How'd you ever think of a thin brass dome?"

And somebody young as we were sagged into the room,
face all caked with blood and
clothes still damp with the natural leakage of a
5-day wine drunk:

*"Well, I may be inverted,*
*"but thank God I'm not insatiable."*

*There'll be BEANS BEANS BEANS enough for you and me*
*in the STORE*
*in the STORE*

•

( Fry - HEIT )

3.
I always used a certain kind of notebook because it took the
ink well.

*"Saints are well fish"*

*Irridescent as horse fly*
*Ink should be*
*Should float upon the*
*Agéd scroll*

And lost my rained-on Swann's Way, notes on the flyleaf,
"Water-lily Image," "His old Church." Lost
my footlocker full of notes
letters from cracking-up friends
hall notes from landlords
impassioned scribblings from urinal walls
carbons of letters (my own so young)

*Please don't leave garbage in the*
*hallway as garbage attracts termites*
*and termites are the one thing we*
*haven't had*

4.
After the Toazers and Hindoos and Parables of Zen,
the Writers by Century and all of their friends,
who knows how many sick Frenchmen and
all those 'Murcans comin' on free,
I never had time to read.

*Came then to Chicago, to*
*matriculate*
*among the pro's.*

•

I always expected to find, among those buttresses,
some rude Falstaffian man, surrounded by dogs,
polishing at the armour of his lord . . .
heard, instead, the voices of children, raised in song:

Shakespeare Milton
Shakespeare Milton

Shelley as well
Shelley as well

Sarah something Teasdale
Sarah something Teasdale

Edith M. Bell
Edith M. Bell

•

5.
I wonder what I thought I'd find in all those books —
probably what's there from time to time, but
how could I have known that?

I wonder what it looked like then.

Some young horrifying thing all
muddy, and lurching, and
proud?

I sat brooding where the park is Japanese
with slanting rock and undernourished trees:

Is beauty that's blown from the oldest Sea
But beauty that's borne in the Mind's Eye? We
Who treasure it, just vain deluded men?

*Pourquoi voulez-vous donc q'u'il m'en souvienne*

Taut hams
shove her skirt
now to the right
now to the left

There is nothing more to do today
nothing more to do

Nothing more to do today
nothing more to do

today
to do today

And no explanation but the oldest one of all:

Lady, your visit alone is important to me,
though I'm often inadequate to your simple demand.

For your sake I am unemployable in the world of Man,
am often cruel to friends, and
cannot keep my promises.

Just when I think I know you, you take capricious form:
chair to sea to rock to littlegirl reading on the
supermarket steps; tongue between teeth, so
serious!
legs spread wide (a characteristic pose)

O Waitress in a soiled uniform,
finally bringing me my check

*"And will that be all sir?"*

Yes.

LEO POEMS

## AFTER ANACREON

When I drive cab
I am moved by strange whistles and wear a hat.

When I drive cab
I am the hunter. My prey leaps out from where it
hid, beguiling me with gestures.

When I drive cab
all may command me, yet I am in command of all who do.

When I drive cab
I am guided by voices descending from the naked air.

When I drive cab
A revelation of movement comes to me. They wake now.
Now they want to work or look around. Now they want
drunkenness and heavy food. Now they contrive to love.

When I drive cab
I bring the sailor home from the sea. In the back of
my car he fingers the pelt of his maiden.

When I drive cab
I watch for stragglers in the urban order of things.

When I drive cab
I end the only lit and waitful thing in miles of
darkened houses.

## PASSENGER POEM, THE NURSE

I don't like cats kittens are all right I guess
you can love 'em when they're little, like people,
but then they grow up and take advantage of you

and how can you love 'em anymore?

## PASSENGER POEM, MRS. ANGUS

There's lots of death down there
and a fish the Spanish people eat
couldn't get me near one
red they are, like meat
Bonita.

A famous jockey and two other lads,
and him with a big race comin' up Sunday,
went out at night in a little boat
and they was washed I think
to a place of reptiles, and eaten, for
none of 'em was ever found.

Yon place scares me.

## TOP OF THE MARK

*for John Wieners*

I guess it's only natural that they
go about their planet as they do
all night long:

Top of the Mark, St. Francis,
Fairmont, Sir Francis Drake

What a price they pay for what they see!

*I cannot help them*
*I will not cheat them*

Yesterday I drove the actual Cab of Heaven . I am
Leo . I was born this way

my mane is longer than the sun

## BARBARA/VAN GOGH POEM

Barbara, think what'd happen if Van Gogh'd ever seen
eucalyptus trees
Or knew my coves on up this coast where nobody ever goes
firewood everywhere . steep rock . birds

I give you my city of daemonic friends and sweet-smoke
saintly rooms where I could love you 5 slow ways
You who dream my suicide and claim to want beginning

I sold my wedding ring and bought cheap gold for your ears
where the moon is even wilder than you think .
there is just one cricket . and the light we would
lay by, shattered

More than in that Dutchman's funny eye

## LEO, PLEASED

What Chaucer used to call "Love Longynge" is only
hunger
Only drives the mind to fancy feasts
when all we need is this
fed feeling

You,
Who crouch to my Lion,
Cuff me and play, thy
Notch flowing Rum and Honey . . .

— *honey and essences of rum*
*rum and the essence of almonds* —

How can we tell them strong enough dangerous
Nations of us taught to
Starve till we almost learn to live that way
Tremble & twitch through dark unnecessary dreams fingers
Numb
Whole bodies shy, suspicious
Bodies but
(not so secretly) powered to

Now let's have chunks of citrus in a wooden bowl!
Now let's have eggs poached in milk & paprika!

*—sweeten my coffee with honey*
*O sweeten my coffee with rum —*

•

Lion

Lying on his side

*"golden syrup"*

(within the belly, bees begin to build)

•

## LEO, IN ABSENCE OF FIRE

Tonight the fires are all outside,
I cannot manage them

matches will not strike
are never in the pockets I reach for
no smoldering of incense
(though I thought I saw a flame leap up)

I, Leo
Leo my Sign and Star
Leo my Star as the World has a Star

Lew + World inscribed in a
giant heart, pierced by an arrow —
the feather shaggy: a flame.

O Lady why did you not come?
Lady. Anne.

O Anne I taste your skin
all last week you lay in the sun & got so brown
Your skin so salt . . .

no white gas for the Coleman
wood in the woodstove just won't burn

moth

smashed in the wax of my candle

---

*Commentary by The Red Monk*

*Anyone who confuses his mistress with his muse*
*is asking for real trouble from both of them.*

## SONG OF A SELF

If this is what life is,
Could one of your Gods do it better?

I make what I see, and I make what I hear
with Eye and my animal eye —
with ear and my Auditing Ear . . .

*full*
*full of my gift*
*I am never*
*left out and afraid*

And this what the song is
(all of you waking and working and going to bed)

I sing what you'd know if you took time to hear,
I know what you'd learn if you had cause to care
Envy my wildness if you will . . .

*full*
*full of my gift*
*I am often*
*left out and afraid*

And this all my art is
(that stays at the distance the stage is)

You turn from my songs into one another's arms,
As I, who have taken you all to my heart,
Would sometime be taken to heart . . .

*full*
*full of my gift*
*I am only*
*left out and afraid*

---

*Commentary by The Red Monk*

*Except for things like the Yaws, there is no suffering unless we invent someone to suffer the suffering.*

# ENTIRE SERMON BY THE RED MONK

1.
We invent ourselves.
2.
We invent ourselves out of ingredients we didn't
choose, by a process we can't control.
3.
The Female Impersonator, and the Sadistic Marine can
each trace himself *back* to the same stern, or weak, father.
4.
Usually it's less dramatic. He was only indifferently
a basketball player. Now he is selling cars.
5.
The baby on the floor cannot be traced, *forward,*
to anything.
6.
It's all your own fault then.
7.
On all kinds of baby purpose, you invented whoever
you think you are. Out of ingredients you couldn't
choose, by a process you can't control.

All you really say is, "Love me for myself alone."

8.
It is also possible to *uninvent* yourself. By a process
you can't control.
9.
But you invented Leo. Forget it.

IN SAFEWAY PARKING LOTS,
OLD MEN DRIVE SLOWLY.
BACKWARDS.

Leo, with his cock of Port,
70 miles-an-hour,
passing trains:

*The last time I was in Amarillo,*
*I smoked my first cigar,*
*and Roosevelt died.*

ON OUT

## CIRCLE POEMS

Whenever I have a day off, I write a new poem.
Does this mean you shouldn't work, or that you
write best on your day off?

For example, this is the poem I wrote today.

•

When he was 20, he understood some of the secrets of
life, and under took to write them down so simply that
even an idiot could understand.
"For," he reasoned, "if I can't do that, I don't
understand it myself."

He proved himself right.
When he was 50, he didn't understand it himself.

"Why is it," he said, "that no matter what you say, a woman always takes it personally?"

"I never do," she said.

•

John said, "Then I met that short fat guy with the neat little beard, with a name like dawn."

"You mean George Abend?"

"Yeah."

"Abend means evening."

## IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION FROM P. W.

In Mexico I'll finish the novel I'll write, rough, while
fire-watching in Oregon.
The problem is, what kind of typewriter to pack in?

I ought to be able to live 6 months in Mexico on what I
earn on the Mountain in 4.
They say you can buy dirty books down there.

Since they give you horses to pack things in, how would it
be if I took in a big old typewriter and left it there?
They don't give you horses to pack things out.

Going to Mexico by motorcycle would be the coolest, but
Thoreau warns against any undertaking that
requires new clothes.
Walking is pure, but I haven't achieved simplicity yet.
I'll never willingly hitch-hike again.

Next winter I can buy Snyder's Austin for $200, but how
can I get the money together?
They repossesed my Oldsmobile.
I've never made the foreign-country scene.

Like the sign over the urinal: "You hold your future
in your hand."
Or what the giant negro whore once said, in the back of my cab:

*Man, you sure do love diggin' at my*
*titties, now stop that. We get where*
*we going you can milk me like a*
*Holstein, but I gotta see your*
*money first.*

## HIKING POEM / HIGH SIERRA

Measurements can never tell it:

4,000 feet down into a canyon and
4,500 feet up the other side,
in a little under 8 miles, with a
30 pound pack on my back . . . or

Several times up and down the stairs of the
Empire State Building, in
one afternoon, with
30 pound pack on my back

BEAT BARD
BEATS BUILDING
"Pooped," says Poet

How many million years to miracle human shape now working,

"As no other animal"

just to look around

1.
Ant Lion traps in the trail dust.

— thumbs under pack straps
I can only look down —

thousands upon thousands of them!
perfect cones (quivering at the bottom)

*Are Ant Lion traps worse than how we dammed Hetch Hetchy?*

"forgive SF housewives
all their washing"

Scarring it, all of us, in our fashion.

Grouse,
huge clumsy birds,
crash around in the pine trees

breaking branches

2.
*Absolute fatigue perhaps way to Perfect Total Enlightenment?*

my last poor shred of sense decides to count my steps

900 901 902 903 904 905

"surely half a mile" becomes, thereby,
a little less than 300 yards

THE MIRACLE OF THE HUMAN MIND!

12 hours going in, counting and cursing all the way,
6 hours coming out, free.

*Trails go nowhere.*
*They end exactly*
*where you stop.*

3.
Mile-high humps of granite are like bubbles in our
Cream-of-Wheat

hundred-foot trees like tiny moss on mile-high
humps of Cream-of-Wheat
Inverted Ant Lion traps, quivering?
On top?

An interesting play of the mind, but only
an interesting play of the mind:
The scales are off my eyes . . .

I saw humanity merge into one last giant
junky, waiting (for The Man), on some last
barren ridge, last,
most horrible vision of Man-Hooked Man . . .

Or make it gentler. Nail a sign to one of these trees.

VOTE HERE

for example

4.
after dinner I took a walk
and She said so sweetly
(finally finding me alone)

*Why do men look for lost cities*
*when lost groves grow*
*just over the next knoll and the*
*next, and next . . .*

And all that has always sickened me,
all I know my kind will always be,
dropped away again
into the same old poem

you bear with me.

## FOUR STUDIES IN PERCEPTION

*Laurels*

A grove of Laurel grows in the city park.
It grows whether I look at it or not.

It grows whether I look at it or not,
by a path deliberately unintended (unattended).

I can find it. I can see it. I can sing:

*Magical Tree!*
*Leaf in my Mother's stew!*
*Crown! Chew*
*thy leaves to brighten*
*color in my eyes?*

But all of it,
Singer, Song, the Grove itself,
disappears, instantly,
if I only look another way.

If I only look another way, I make
Bulldozers, Baseball Players, and, later
Owls

---

*To become enamoured of our Powers is to lose them, at once!*

---

It grows whether I look at it or not.
If, as I plan, I wish to chew these leaves and
braid myself a wreath,
I cannot wish the Grove to grow on Taraval Street.

And all our Certainties are
tinier thoughts, even,

than that.

Near the grove of Laurel is a stand of Giant Fern Trees. I can find it. I can see it. I can sing:

*Hey Old Feather Tree! O Strange!*
*Big Bush!*
*Ancient! Unchanged!*

How do I see "ancientness," "unchanged," all sharks, lizards, cockroach . . .

*plaster reconstruction of a pre-historic*
*forest in Chicago museum strange bugs*
*sitting on the fronds Nevada fossils in a*
*sandy rock my preference for cave-like*
*rooms recurrent dreams of giant lizards*
*waking mis-takes on beaches sandy deserts*
*rock-mass or driftwood seen as giant lizard*
*darting at me, terrible sight on trail*
*Chameleon in the jaws of Snake changing*
*color changing color changing color in the*
*different teeth of death, and I pitied*
*Snake his awful meal . . .*

is "Ancientness":

A Pre-Historic Giant Fern Forest now

GROWING!

(before my very eyes)

*Brown Small Bird*

The Nightingale will always be a mythical bird.
Did you ever see one outside Poetry?
The Nightingale is named into anonymity, like a Monk,
like the celebrated girl who is only beautiful.

What a different thing it was when
Wild-Bird took
actual berries from my hand.

Blessed, I wanted statues made of it, a
city named, or something

Brown, small, bird.
Not to be known by his name anymore

than you, or me

*Re-echo*

The mind wants all our mountains wadded into one.
Frightened, on the mountain, the mind
looks back at itself:
*"I climbed Hood once."*
*"McKinley's twice as high."*
Remember our honeymoon in Switzerland?

*There's a*
*small ho-*
*tel*

"Listen, I
"ast for that song because I
"like that song. You guys mess around with it I
"can't even hear the tune."

If the tune's so important, man,
why don't you go into the can and
whistle it to yourself?

## WOBBLY ROCK

for Gary Snyder

*"I think I'll be the Buddha of this place"*

*and sat himself*
*down*

1.
It's a real rock

(believe this first)

Resting on actual sand at the surf's edge:
Muir Beach, California

(like everything else I have
somebody showed it to me and I found it by myself)

Hard common stone
Size of the largest haystack
It moves when hit by waves
Actually shudders

(even a good gust of wind will do it
if you sit real still and keep your mouth shut)

Notched to certain center it
Yields and then comes back to it:

Wobbly tons

2.

Sitting here you look below to other rocks
Precisely placed as rocks of Ryoanji:
Foam like swept stones

(the mind getting it all confused again:
"snow like frosting on a cake"
"rose so beautiful it don't look real")

Isn't there a clear example here —
Stone garden shown to me by
Berkeley painter I never met
A thousand books and somebody else's boatride ROCKS

(garden)

EYE

(nearly empty despite this clutter-image all
the opposites cancelling out a
CIRCULAR process: *Frosting-snow*)

Or think of the monks who made it 4 hundred 50 years ago
Lugged the boulders from the sea
Swept to foam original gravelstone from sea

(and saw it, even then, when finally they
all looked up the
instant AFTER it was made)

And now all rocks are different and
All the spaces in between

(which includes about everything)

The instant
After it is made

3.

*I have been in many shapes before I attained congenial form*
All those years on the beach, lifetimes . . .

When I was a boy I used to watch the Pelican:
It always seemed his wings broke
And he dropped, like scissors, in the sea . . .
Night fire flicking the shale cliff
Balls tight as a cat after the cold swim
Her young snatch sandy . . .

*I have travelled*
*I have made a circuit*
*I have lived in 14 cities*
*I have been a word in a book*
*I have been a book originally*

*Dychymig Dychymig:* (riddle me a riddle)

Waves and the sea. If you
take away the sea

Tell me what it is

4.

Yesterday the weather was nice there were lots of people
Today it rains, the only other figure is far up the beach

(by the curve of his body I know he leans against the
tug of his fishingline: there is no separation)

Yesterday they gathered and broke gathered and broke like
Feeding swallows dipped down to pick up something ran back to
Show it
And a young girl with jeans rolled to mid-thigh ran
Splashing in the rain creek

*"They're all so damned happy —*
*why can't they admit it?"*

Easy enough until a little rain shuts beaches down . . .

Did it mean nothing to you Animal that turns this
Planet to a smokey rock?
Back among your quarrels
How can I remind you of your gentleness?

Jeans are washed
Shells all lost or broken
Driftwood sits in shadow boxes on a tracthouse wall

Like swallows you were, gathering
Like people I wish for . . .

cannot even tell this to that fisherman

5.

3 of us in a boat the size of a bathtub . pitching in
slow waves . fish poles over the side . oars

We rounded a point of rock and entered a small cove

Below us:
fronds of kelp
fish
crustaceans
eels
Then us
then rocks at the cliff's base
starfish
(hundreds of them sunning themselves)
final starfish on the highest rock then
Cliff
4 feet up the cliff a flower
grass
further up more grass
grass over the cliff's edge
branch of pine then
Far up the sky

a hawk

Clutching to our chip we are jittering in a spectrum
Hung in the film of this narrow band
Green
to our eyes only

6.

On a trail not far from here
Walking in meditation
We entered a dark grove
And I lost all separation in step with the
Eucalyptus as the trail walked back beneath me

Does it need to be that dark or is
Darkness only its occasion
Finding it by ourselves knowing
Of course
Somebody else was there before . . .

I like playing that game
Standing on a high rock looking way out over it all:

*"I think I'll call it the Pacific"*

Wind water
Wave rock
Sea sand

(there is no separation)

Wind that wets my lips is salt
Sea breaking within me balanced as the
Sea that floods these rocks. Rock
Returning to the sea, easily, as
Sea once rose from it. It
Is a sea rock

(easily)

I am
Rocked by the sea

## TWO LIKE VILLANELLES

*They're tearing down all the Victorian Mansions and building Freeways in Portland Oregon & everywhere*

"and the rough places
shall be plane"

In a landscape of ruined buildings,
on a small rock wheeling about the heavens and
comin' on green to crack sidewalks,
you looked so beautiful picking blackberries
all the long summer afternoon.

The berries!
Berries made fountains of fruit and thorn on
rubble, iron fence and gate, on
basement steps to basement now just
berry-pit.

And you!
You looked so beautiful picking blackberries,
long black hair in the summer sun, black eyes
glancing up to where I stood

In a landscape of ruined buildings,
on a small green rock

wheeling about the heavens

*For all the Wet Green Girls*

I found myself, green girls, in a month like May,
in a green green garden at the break of day

all around me gray rain beat
and the cage that I am was an empty zoo

in a garden, girls, at a break like May
in the first wet light of the sun

when, from a rock in the arbor lept
a sleeping cat, through

gray green cages of deserted zoo
where I found myself on a breaking day

as bright rain beat upon the garden stone
where the lept cat left his belly print

alone, young girls, when my head unbent
in a green green garden at the break of day

and I saw what came
and I watched what went

Green Girls

I rate my fury with the
bumblebee, banging at my windowpane,

though I open it, I
always have to shoo him on his way

and the next day (believing it
really worked) the same thing furiously:

missing it, an
eighth of an inch away

not necessarily straight ahead,
you understand, and

almost never
up

•

*oyez*
BOX 3014 — BERKELEY
California